

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 0256

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: EAID, LE, SA

SUBJECT: SAUDI ASSISTANCE TO LEBANON

REF: (A) JIDDA 406, (B) STATE 12998, (C) BEIRUT 78

1. IT OCCURS TO US THAT LATEST INDICATION OF SAUDI INTEREST IN OUR ASSESSMENT OF LEBANON'S RELIEF AND RECONSTRUCTION NEEDS MAY PROVIDE USEFUL OPPORTUNITY TO ENCOURAGE US-SAUDI COOPERATION IN THIS AREA. LEBANESE PRIME MINISTER AL-HOSS TOLD US, FOLLOWING HIS VISIT TO SAUDI ARABIA, THAT SAUDIS HAD PROMISED TO HELP IN RECONSTRUCTION EFFORTS BUT HAVE NOT YET NAMED A FIGURE. COORDINATION WITH U.S. MIGHT SPEED UP SAG ACTION, TAKE SOME OF THE PRESSURE OFF US AND ENCOURAGE THE GULF STATES TO CONTRIBUTE (AS INDICATED REFTELS).

2. WE UNDERSTAND FROM PRIME MINISTER AL-HOSS THAT SAUDIS ARE PRIMARILY INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING IN A LONG-TERM, MULTILATERAL ARAB EFFORT, PERHAPS TO BE FINANCED THROUGH THE KUWAIT-BASED ARAB FUND FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT. HOWEVER, LEBANON ALSO HAS SEVERAL URGENT NEEDS WHERE US-SAUDI JOINT EFFORT MIGHT BE USEFUL. US AID TEAM'S REPORT WILL UNDOUBTEDLY REVEAL SEVERAL SUCH PRIORITY REQUIREMENTS, BUT GOL HAS ALREADY DISCUSSED TWO WITH US:

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A. THE PORT OF BEIRUT: PORT EQUIPMENT, WAREHOUSING AND THE REPAIR OF THE GRAIN HANDLING FACILITIES ARE URGENTLY NEEDED. IF, AS SEEMS LIKELY, FUNDS REQUIRED WILL EXCEED WHAT WE CAN PROVIDE OUT OF \$15 MILLION REMAINING FROM SPECIAL APPROPRIATION FOR LEBANON, PERHAPS SAG WOULD BE WILLING TO JOIN WITH US

IN A JOINT PACKAGE. HELPING TO GET THE BEIRUT PORT GOING AGAIN WOULD SERVE POLITICAL, HUMANITARIAN, AND ECONOMIC PURPOSES: POLITICALLY, BECAUSE, UNLIKE JOUNIEH AND SIDON, IT SERVES ALL OF LEBANON; HUMANITARIAN, BECAUSE ITS RECONSTRUCTION WILL FACILITATE RELIEF SHIPMENTS, PARTICULARLY FOOD; AND ECONOMICALLY, BECAUSE IT IS ONLY PORT CAPABLE OF HANDLING HEAVY EQUIPMENT WHICH WILL BE VITAL FOR LEBANON'S RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT.

B. EMERGENCY EQUIPMENT PACKAGE FOR ROAD IMPROVEMENT. DURING RECENT VISIT OF AID TEAM, MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS BIZRI SAID THAT AS SOON AS THE WINTER IS OVER HE WANTS TO BEGIN IMMEDIATELY ON A COUNTRY-WIDE PROGRAM TO IMPROVE THE BADLY DAMAGED ROAD SYSTEM, THUS PROVIDING SUBSTANTIAL EMPLOYMENT FOR UNSKILLED LABOR, AND CONVINCING PEOPLE THAT THE GOVERNMENT WAS ACTING QUICKLY TO MEET THEIR NEEDS. HOWEVER, HIS MINISTRY HAS BEEN STRIPPED OF ALL ITS EQUIPMENT AND DESPERATELY NEEDS BULLDOZERS, GRADERS, ROLLERS, ETC. UNLESS THESE MACHINES ARE PURCHASED ALMOST IMMEDIATELY, THIS PROGRAM WILL BE DELAYED.

3. WE WOULD WELCOME JIDDA'S COMMENTS ON POSSIBILITY THAT USG-SAUDI COOPERATION IN PROVIDING AID TO LEBANON WOULD BE USEFUL IN TERMS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF US-SAUDI RELATIONS.
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